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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Integrating Care and Critical Reflection in Women's Leadership Development Programs**

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**Women's leadership development programs (WLDPs) have been suggested as programmatic additions for achieving gender-equity in organizational contexts. These programs are conceptualized as transformative learning spaces affording women the opportunity to explore uncritically examined assumptions and create new perspectives of themselves as leaders. The author explains how these types of transformative learning environments are predicated on dialogue that encourages critical reflection in the context of caring relationships. Recognizing that women may arrive in leadership programs with varied capacities for both relational learning and critical reflection, the author sought to explore the communication practices needed to create the dialogic conditions of care and critical reflection. The paper outlines the results of a qualitative study that examined critical incidents of dialogue in a women's leadership development program to demonstrate the ways in which facilitators communicate to create these conditions. The results suggest how taking a communication perspective on dialogue may increase a facilitator's capacity to integrate care and critical reflection.**

**Keywords:** women's leadership development programs (WLDPs); transformative Learning; dialogue; coordinated management of meaning

## **Introduction**

Considerable progress occurred toward advancing women in leadership in the later part of the twentieth century. The gender wage gap narrowed, segregation within professions declined, and the number of women in leadership positions steadily increased (Warner & Corely, 2017). Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, notable progress continued in women's representation in top leadership positions. The share of companies with women in executive leadership increased more than six fold from 1997 to 2009 (Warner & Corely, 2017).

While the number of women in management and leadership positions suggest that the glass ceiling may no longer be an apt metaphor for the experience of women in leadership, women still face significant challenges (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Rhode, 2017; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). These include continued overt discrimination (Hill, Miller, Benson, & Handley, 2016). However, even more prevalent is the subtle bias and organizational structures built on masculine ideals of leadership (Cikara & Fiske, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Rhode, 2017).

Leaders who are outspoken, authoritative, forceful, and competitive are viewed positively and promoted to higher level positions. This places women who have been socialized to communicate and behave more collaboratively in a double-bind (Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women that communicate and operate in a more feminine way are often viewed as weak leaders and overlooked for advancement into higher level leadership. However, women who adopt a competitive work-style, handle conflict directly, or in anyway present too masculine risk being judged harshly and also not advanced. This puts women in a no-win situation. They can either present authentically and not be viewed as a strong leader, or they can project a more masculine presence and be penalized for not meeting the social expectations of women's behavior (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Combined with organizational structures that reinforce masculine values, women often internalize these biases, which can interfere with their ability to see and develop themselves as leaders (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2001; Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

In addition, while gender expectations in regards to childrearing and housekeeping are slowly shifting, women continue to be accountable for a large share of family

responsibilities (Rhode, 2017; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). This fact, combined with organizational contexts that have not necessarily kept up with changing gender norms and undervalue caregiving make it difficult for women to attend to family obligations while climbing the leadership ladder (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2011; Slaughter, 2015). The result is that women often find themselves struggling to balance work and family obligations (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sabattini & Crosby, 2009).

The challenges that women face in developing an authentic and recognized leadership identity combined with difficulties in balancing work and life can lead to an ambivalence toward leadership advancement. Women often become conflicted about advancing in their careers at the expense of family life and/or are challenged to make changes within their organizations that better match their unique values and needs (Clarke, 2010; Vinnicombe, Moore, & Anderson, 2013). To succeed in leadership, these women must find ways to navigate a landscape that holds women leaders to outdated expectations and personal perceptions, and this requires profound reflection, not just development of skills and techniques (Debebe, 2011; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002).

In other words, women leaders need opportunities to examine the ways in which they view themselves in relation to the world around them to develop their full leadership potential. With this in mind, women's leadership development programs (WLDPs) are suggested as important programmatic additions for promoting increased gender-equity (Debebe, Anderson, Bilimoria, & Vinnicombe, 2016; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002). These programs are conceived as transformative learning spaces that provide women opportunities to critically examine the internalized social perspectives that often stunt their ability to fully embrace themselves as leaders (Debebe, 2011; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002). The purpose of WLDPs is to provide women an opportunity to question previously unexamined assumptions to build an authentic leader identity (Debebe et al., 2016).

In contrast with general leadership programs that focus on enhancing leaders' performance with emphasis on skill acquisition to distinguish oneself from others, WLDPs are noted to approach leadership development from a relational frame that encourages participants to discover their leadership identity in connection with others (Sugiyama, Cavanagh, van Esch, Bilimoria, & Brown, 2016). While caring and relational ways of knowing have been demonstrated across genders, there are studies that suggest a greater proportion of women who show caring and relational orientations (Eagly, 2005; Gilligan, 1982). With this in mind, WLDPs have also been noted to remove gender pressures that may prevent women from openly examining their unique leadership experiences and to allow for the use of gender-sensitive teaching and learning practices more compatible with women's more caring, connected, and relational ways of knowing (Debebe, 2011).

There are some who feel that women's only programs provide artificial environments that remove women from the real-life challenges they must contend with in organizations and deprive them of the ability to add networks of male peers (Ely et al., 2001). Others suggest that these environments shift the focus away from the more systemic and structural issues that continue to challenge advancement. Still others believe that such programs stigmatize women by suggesting that women need to be fixed in order to lead (Vinnicombe et al., 2013). However, WLDPs have been demonstrated as effective additions to traditional leadership development programs (Debebe et al., 2016; Vinnicombe et al., 2013). WLDPs provide opportunities for women to develop self-awareness and improve self-confidence, as well as develop skills, strategies, and support networks to address challenges that are unique to their leadership journeys (Clarke, 2010).

Effective WLDP programs are described as safe spaces where women can reflect on and explore their leadership identities. However, these spaces must go beyond the supportive to be effective. Topics and discussion must be situated in a larger critical analysis of second generation gender bias and the systematic structural contexts that perpetuate the same. In the spirit of transformative learning, these environments require conditions that go beyond caring (Brookfield, 2005). Dialogue that pushes individuals to critically examine perspectives within a supportive network is essential (Mezirow, 2003). To achieve the dialogic conditions for transformative learning conditions of both care and critical reflection are needed.

This nuance raises an important question for educators and facilitators of WLDPs—how do we create conditions of care while also encouraging critical reflection? This is not to suggest that these conditions are inherently at odds, but rather that to encourage critical reflection within a context care is hard work. Caring for the other does not suggest a removal of critical reflection on what is good (Noddings, 1984). Regardless of educators' focus on care for their students they must be strong and focused on using the good created by this relationship to impact that which is not good in society (Noblit, 1993; Noddings, 1984). In the context of WLDPs, this means that facilitators need to ensure that the new meanings that are created together foster a greater appreciation of the subtle and internalized gender biases that permeate women's experiences at work.

In this paper, I outline the results of my inquiry into the ways in which facilitators communicated with adult women in a leadership development program to create the dialogic conditions for transformative learning. After a review of the literature to better understand the need for care and critical reflection in WLDPs, I describe the ways in which facilitators in a women's leadership program created a context of care and how critical reflection occurred within this context. I suggest viewing dialogue from a communication perspective—paying attention to the process

of communication and not just content—can help facilitators maintain the delicate balance between care and critical reflection.

### Literature Review

Researchers have presented the idea of WLDPs as transformative learning environments. Transformative learning is that which alters existing perspectives to be more inclusive, open, and reflective (Mezirow, 2003; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Experiencing transformative learning involves making new meaning through questioning one's own and others' experiences (Cranton, 2006). It is through critical dialogue that interlocutors are able to assess the ways in which each justifies her interpretations or beliefs and eventually find common meaning (Freire, 2000; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Mezirow (2003) asserted that this dialogue process involves examining beliefs, feelings, and values in a critical, rational manner. This requires listening, empathy, holding off judgment, and seeking common ground by all participants.

The dialogue process for transformative learning requires both critical reflection and care and connection (Carter, 2002; McGregor, 2004; O'Hara, 2003). Relationship has been shown to be especially important when working with women learners (English & Irving, 2012; English & Peters, 2012). Due to traditional gender socialization, women tend to think of themselves and others in more relational ways (Gilligan, 1982). Attending to these relational ways of knowing is highlighted in much of the literature focused on women's learning and development (English & Peters, 2012).

WLDPs are suggested as important additions to leadership development initiatives with this in mind. WLDPs are emphasized as safe spaces where women can discuss, reflect, and test out their experiences with those of others (Debebe, 2011; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002). In mixed gender groups, gender pressures persist which limit women's abilities to fully and openly examine their unique leadership experiences. WLDPs provide a safe environment that removes gender pressures both because of the single-sex nature of the programs, but also because of the use of gender-sensitive teaching and learning practices more attuned to women's caring, connected, and relational ways of knowing (Debebe, 2011).

However, the transformative learning literature cautions against viewing transformative learning as a primarily intuitive, creative, and emotional process (Brookfield, 1986, 2000, 2005; Gunnlaugson, 2007). A shift toward more relational ways of knowing, at the expense of critical reflection, is problematic because it can marginalize reason, and thus avoid the essential element of social critique (Brookfield, 1986, 2000, 2005; Gunnlaugson, 2007). English and Peters (2012) found this to be true in their research with women. While they found transformation and development occurred in the context of relationship, they also concluded

these relationships were "not necessarily the friendly, affirming, and uncritically supportive bonds often presented as foundational for women's learning" (English & Peters, 2012, p. 114). These authors suggested critical reflection occurs within constructive conflicts arising between role models, mentors, and friends (English & Peters, 2012, p. 114).

Sugiyama, et. al. (2016) also suggested there is value in merging the epistemological and pedagogical approaches of WLDPs with more traditional leadership development approaches to develop leaders regardless of gender (Sugiyama et al., 2016). In their review of both general leadership programs and WLDPs, they found critical reflection—a standing back, or differentiation from others—is as essential to leader's development as is connecting to others (Sugiyama et al., 2016). Building on Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1997) concept of women's ways of knowing, Sugiyama et al. (2016) offered a model for more inclusive leadership development incorporating both separate and connected knowing. They suggested,

for inclusive leadership development, the presence of both separate and connected knowing increases the potential for individuals to both differentiate but also gain the relational connections that support and enable necessary leadership shifts. (Sugiyama et al., 2016, p. 284)

Separate knowing stands back and doubts (Belenky et al., 1997). This is the knowing stance Mezirow believed is needed in the transformative learning process (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). Conversely, connected knowing involves acquiring and validating information by trying to understand another's perspective using empathy and imagination (Belenky et al., 1997). This type of knowing encourages listening and creates a more open and level forum where people with different viewpoints can communicate to achieve common understanding (Belenky & Stanton, 2000).

Developing and facilitating WLDPs that meet both of these requirements is a challenging endeavor. Programs need to be designed and facilitated in ways that maintain a delicate balance between care, connection, and critical reflection. Facilitators are called upon to help program participants build and maintain relationships with each other while at the same time encouraging critical assessment of perspectives (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Cranton, 2006; Vella, 2008; Walton, 2010).

To create dialogue that both sustains connection and holds critical tension, educators are called to become facilitative co-learners with a primary objective of building and maintaining relationships with and between students (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Cranton, 2006; Vella, 2008). At the same time, they need to be conscious of the power

inherent in their position and to use this power responsibly (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Cranton, 2006). All along one needs to be aware of individual differences in ideas, feelings, and actions of students and to develop ways of ensuring that all voices are heard (Cranton, 2006; Vella, 2008; Walton, 2010).

Such open-ended goals have served to increase demands on facilitators. An abundance of suggestions are proposed for the things that they are supposed to be and do (Cranton, 2006). Practitioners working for transformative learning are called on to be knowledgeable, student-centered, organized, prepared, and structured in their learning activities, while establishing supportive learning environments (Apte, 2009; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Vella, 2008). It is important that they are authentic and immediate with students to foster respectful relationships that safely support challenging dialogue and praxis (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Cranton, 2006; Cranton & Wright, 2008; Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010; Vella, 2008; Walton, 2010).

Adult educators are being called to be mindful, appreciative, and conversationally competent. Their role is to facilitate and provide space for students to speak and learn from others (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). Monitoring the conversation, questioning, listening, and responding are acknowledged by many in the field as central to this process (Apte, 2009; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Chetro-Szivos & Gray, 2004; Cranton, 2006; Ziegler, Paulus, & Woodside, 2006). However, these researchers fall short of explaining the ways to manage the moment-to-moment facilitation, and none specifically address the specific challenge of working with adult women. To fill this gap in the literature, I asked the question-- how do educators create the dialogic conditions for transformative learning with adult female students?

### Methods

To answer this question, I conducted a qualitative interview study. The setting for the study was a WLDP offered within a degree completion program for adult women. Part of this program is a three-course Women as Empowered Learners and Leaders (WELL) series specifically developed for reflection on personal goals, strengths, professional life planning, and issues related to women in the workplace. Each of these courses is designed to engage students in dialogue around these topics to empower them to take ownership of their lives and change how they view the world. Each of the three courses is 6-weeks long during which there are 3 5-hour Saturday seminar sessions combined with online interaction. The content, as well as the process, followed in this all women's leadership program provided a context that supported the type of reflective, transformative dialogue.

Facilitators of these sessions are expected to lead class discussion, provide instruction for assignments and support students' development as leaders. I interviewed eight facilitators with a minimum of one year of experience

teaching in this program using a variation of the critical incident technique (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005; Flanagan, 1954). Each facilitator completed a written dialogue description form describing a critical incident of classroom dialogue they felt demonstrated the components of care, connection, and critical reflection. Care was defined as paying attention to the feelings, needs, and interests of others. Connection was defined as developing and maintaining relationships and/or active engagement with others. Critical reflection was defined as the ability to question, analyze, and judge one's own as well as others' ideas, opinions, and assumptions. This step was followed by a semi-structured interview with each of the facilitators to elaborate on the dialogue episodes and the communication behaviors used to create them.

The number of students in the recalled incidents of dialogue varied from 8 to 18, and ranged in age from 20s to 50s. Most of the students were described as middle to lower-middle socioeconomic class, and many had some previous academic experience. The professional experience of the students varied, with some being stay-at-home moms and others working in lower-level supervisory positions.

To analyze the data, I used coordinated management of meaning (CMM). Pearce and Cronen (1982) developed CMM is a practical communication theory. Their theory is based on social-constructionist view of communication, which affirms communication as the primary social process. CMM provides several heuristics researchers can use to deconstruct communication and appreciate the ways in which participants in particular episodes of communication are dancing together to create meaning, and the resources they are using in the process.

Phase one of the analysis process was to describe and interpret each of the critical incidents. First, I read and re-read the written dialogue description forms, interview transcripts and my field notes to create serpentine diagrams of each incident as described. Serpentine diagrams are a CMM tool used to storyboard the turns of a particular conversational episodes. I used these serpentine outlines to develop a thick description of each of the recalled critical incidents of dialogue. I then utilized the CMM hierarchy model, which gives a way of thinking about the contextual resources or stories that are being used to make sense of a situation, to identify the multiple layers of stories the facilitators and their participants used to make sense of the sequences of turns.

Once I had a thick description of each of the individual incidents, I moved to phase two of the analysis, which involved reading and rereading each of the incident descriptions and serpentine diagrams. In addition, I entered and coded the text of dialogue turns into *dedoose*© to help me identify patterns and in the contexts, behaviors, and participants ways of knowing across the incidents.

## Findings

These analytic steps allowed me to describe the ways in which facilitators created a context of care and observe how critical reflection occurred within this context of care.

### Creating a Context of Care

The facilitators in this study created a context of care for the participants in the class. Care is demonstrated in the ways in which they structured and facilitated class activities. Facilitators in the study were noted to present material and modify their class plans in ways that addressed their participants' needs and concerns. Moreover, they regularly provided their participants with verbal and non-verbal demonstrations of approval and support. They also created this context of care through active listening, observing, and monitoring the dialogue occurring between participants in the classroom.

T6 "Sasha said something about she felt that people who stayed home were just sitting around all day."

T7 Molly asked Kathy "to explain, to actually tell us about a normal day for her...if it meant she was actually home all day or that she volunteered during the day while her kids were at school."

T8 Kathy shares her experience "of being a stay at home mom for all those years and the things she was able to do because she was a stay at home mom. She was able to be on the PTO, PTA and she was able to make lunches for her kids and be there when they got home from school....but she was still at the school every day being a teacher helper or bringing meals for different things going on at the school. She was still busy throughout the day, kind of like someone who worked, but she gave us more information about that."

T9 Molly observed "Sasha's body language, she began to turn a little bit away from Kathy," and says, "Okay, let's make sure that we are all talking to each other and facing each other when we're having conversation."

Within these turns we see that Molly, while not asserting herself as a main contributor or actor in the conversation, was carefully monitoring the conversation between the students. In T6, she picked up on the possible stereotyping of stay-at-home mothers by Sasha. Rather than directly alerting Sasha to the danger of her generalization, Molly interjected with a clarifying question about Kathy's experience to address the validity of the stereotype. In T9, she picked up non-verbal behavior, suggesting possible disrespect. She used communal language at that moment to remind the class of their ground rules around maintaining eye contact and open minds while engaging in the class. Overall, in these turns, Molly allowed the students to critically examine and challenge each other's ideas and assumptions about women's roles. However, she was sure to establish appropriate boundaries

and probed as needed to ensure students respected the experiences of others.

Facilitators in the study also demonstrated care in the way they addressed participants' needs. For example, Ann shifted her expectations around how participant presentations should be made when she realized that a participant was exceptionally nervous.

T1 After about nine students had presented their plans, the student that had been particularly hesitant to speak during class gathered enough courage to make her presentation. This student stood up and said "I'll go next, I'm ready."

T2 Ann recognized once the student stood up that she was so nervous that "I asked her if she wanted to sit down because that was how nervous she was, I thought she might faint."

T3 The student said, "No, everybody else has done it, I can do this." She does not go to the front of the room (as the other students had) but stands at her place in the back of the room, braces against her chair and begins to speak.

T4 Ann and the other students shifted in their positions to face the student speaking at her seat.

The first sequence of turns in the dialogue modeled care. The student's nervousness created an implicative force causing Ann to re-frame the episode. Her highest level of context shifted from the episode of student presentations to her relationship with the students. In her reflection she noted,

I think, actually everybody did, they went up to the front of the room and did their presentation; but once this woman stood up, I don't think she could have walked. I think she was so nervous, that she was afraid to walk to the front of the room. We all saw her through the six weeks just really trying to find strength and courage to talk, that no one minded, we were all okay with her standing where she was.

Moreover, facilitators regularly gave their participants verbal and non-verbal approval and support. For example, writing a participant's idea on the white board, or using facial expressions and body language demonstrating a participant's comments were worthy of further discussion. Marcelle described how she smiled and moved toward a participant to demonstrate that while the participant's ideas were off-topic and perhaps controversial, they were worthy of further discussion. This incident began with a student's off-topic, direct, and negative statement about two women with some prominence in popular entertainment media.

T1 A student stated Kim Kardashian and Beyonce were "role models." She proceeds to call both of them

“bitches” and “hoes” based on how they present themselves (dress) to society.

T2 Marcelle gave the student an “are you serious right now?” look acknowledging she was off-topic, but she did not stop the conversation. She moved to stand closer to the student making the comment.

This student’s out of the blue statement created a critical moment in which Marcelle had options about how to act. She could be direct in her feedback to the student – suggesting that perhaps we need to be mindful about the words used in describing women. She could ignore the statement and continue with class as planned. Her choice of action was influenced by her contextual framing of the episode, which was one of caring for students and her role as a facilitator of learning. In describing this series of turns Marcelle stated, “I knew it was off topic and she typically was; that particular [lady]. I always have one. I loved her.”

In addition to this overarching context of care, Marcelle presented an understanding of her role as one of facilitator. She noted that her lesson for the day included the topic of media and images and that she decided in the moment to use this student’s off-topic comment as the jumping-off point to “bring it where I needed it to go in terms of women in the media.” This context of caring facilitation informs her non-

The table below summarizes the ways in which the facilitators in this study communicated to create a context of care in the classroom.

Table 1

*Findings—Context of Care*  
Summary of finding

Summary of finding	Dialogue behaviors observed	Examples
Facilitators consistently demonstrated concern and regard for participants’ needs and feelings	• Modeling care in organizing classroom activities and managing classroom interaction	• Changing expectations for delivering participant presentations
	• Approving of participants contributions to class in verbal and non-verbal ways	• Writing participant ideas on white board, providing positive feedback, moving toward participants
Facilitators maintained environments where participants were able respectfully challenge each other	• Actively listening, observing and monitoring the dialogue	• Setting specific ground rules that enable participants to challenge each other
		• Stepping in to redirect conversation that was becoming less constructive

**Critical Reflection in the Context of Care**

Facilitators promoted critical reflection within this context of care. Care for participants informed the ways and types of

verbal actions. These sent a message to the other students in the class that while she might not have approved of the student’s comment, it is worthy of further reflection. This created enough practical force for another student to engage the first student in a conversation.

T3 Another student asked the first, “Why would you say that?”

T4 The first student responded to the second explaining how she feels like this because she works with young girls and that she doesn’t feel these were images that she should have to see and feel a certain way about.

Marcelle recalled the tone of the student in T3 was non-condescending. She noted the student did not feel negative about the first “because we had already had experience with her in the classroom in terms of voicing her opinion so openly, and the way the class is set up; in the very first class...we talk about ground rules...so, I don’t think she was asking in a judgmental way. It was in a way to generate conversation.” These prior experiences with the student and ground rules can be viewed as pre-turns in the dialogue that create contextual forces which informed the student’s turn within this dialogue exchange.

discriminating behaviors used in the dialogue incidents. Rather than challenging or defending perspectives, the facilitators used questioning or probing. These behaviors are

more about engaging with and understanding vs. separating from or challenging others' ideas. The facilitators sought to have students gain an understanding of the other's perspective to appreciate the similarities and differences of the underlying logics. Each of the facilitators used questioning or probing at least once in their recalled incidents. Probing behaviors were often in combination with caring turns. For example, one facilitator utilized a combination of non-verbal communication and questions to encourage participants to expand on their feelings and underlying perspectives of their contributions to the dialogue.

T5 Marcelle invited other students to share their experience using eye contact and standing right in the middle of the class to demonstrate she was listening and was open to what they are saying. Using first names, she asked those students that do not open up initially, "What do you think about this?" Or, "What do you think of what so-and-so is saying?" What is your experience with that?

T6 Marcelle walked over to students contributing to the discussion and asks follow-up questions such as "Why do you feel like that? What makes you feel so strongly about that? Why does it impact you so greatly?"

This series of turns reflects the ways in which an educator engaged and invited critical reflection within the context of care. Large elements of Marcelle's actions were nonverbal. She described using eye contact and positioning in the classroom to invite and engage students in the dialogue. In probing students' experiences, she used emotional appeals with words such as "feel" in her questions. It was not a hard challenging or defending of one's beliefs but rather a probing with language of emotion. "What makes you feel like that?" In the end, Marcelle noted she and the other students were able to demonstrate connection through "caring when asking her opinion on certain things. It wasn't to have an argument or debate, it was questioning her to let her talk. To say, 'Why do you feel like that?'"

In another incident, a facilitator engaged in an exchange with a student that had a contrary opinion about women leaders after viewing a video.

T6 A student made a comment about not viewing women as leaders as historically accurate because they needed to be physically stronger then; and now that society has changed, physical strength is no longer needed.

T7 Betty was not sure if she understood a student's comments so she dug deeper. Not with "will you clarify?" But more of "what do you know?"

T8 Betty responded to the student's view with a contrary position. Stating, "That yes, she agreed but there were other historical cultures that viewed women

as strong as and equal to men. She offered the example of women and men in Viking culture."

T9 The student thanked Betty for offering her thoughts.

Betty noted that while contrary, her turn (T7) "wasn't like 'I disagree with you' contrary." It was more about what the class had viewed in the video and how she disagreed with that. She made sure she was not putting criticism on the student but rather on the material. In clarifying students' views, Betty's highest level of context included her desire to facilitate learning and reflection but were joined and subordinated to one of care for her students. Her comments suggested she was both attentive of students' feelings while enacting her goals as a facilitator of learning.

Critical reflection was also established through extending, relating, and synthesizing of ideas. The facilitators in this study consistently sought to make connections between participants and their ideas. For example, one facilitator made a conscious decision to invite other participants into the dialogue to help another see that she demonstrated leadership. While debriefing a leadership autobiography exercise

T3 One student replied, "Nope. I'm not a leader. I don't feel I have any leadership qualities at all."

T4 Krystena responded with a probing question of "Are there any particular examples of why you think that?"

T5 The student noted that she does not have leadership role at work or anything like that. She goes on to share her story, which includes being the mother of a disabled child.

In her interview, Krystena remarked that in her many times teaching this course and debriefing this assignment it was the only time a student had said she was not a leader. As such, T3 served as an implicative force that shifted Krystena's framing of the episode. Krystena began defining the episode as debriefing an assignment. The students were given an assignment and as an effective educator it was her job to make sure they fulfilled the assignment. She infused an element of care in the way in which she invited the students to share with the class, but this is not her highest level context.

In T4, episode is replaced as the highest level context by her appreciation of the student's ability to learn from other students rather than being "taught" from the front of the room. She also maintained knowledge of the students' various backgrounds in the class allowing her to encourage connections that may naturally create critical reflection. Within these frames she chose not to respond directly to the student's statement from the viewpoint of an educator. Rather than lecture the student on how leadership can manifest in ways other than positional power, she asked the student to share other parts of her personal experiences with the class.



T7 Other students in the room enter into the dialogue, asking her questions such as “Is your child on an IEP? Are you involved in that?” They also provide positive feedback such as “You’re a strong parent, advocating for your child. Absolutely you’re a leader.” And, “If your child is on an IEP and you’ve been a part of that, you’ve been advocating for your child, so you’ve been a leader for your child.”

In turn T7, students in the class brought their own set of contextual frames to the conversation, which included knowing about what it takes to advocate for a disabled child as well as wanting to support this woman (whom they had only just met). Within these frames, they probed the student’s experience. These contextual resources also led the students to demonstrate their respect of her actions, and extend their understanding of leadership.

T8 Krystena looks for visual cues from the students to guide when to reenter the dialogue with her reposing of the leadership question. “I was definitely looking for visual cues from the student, as she was shaking or nodding her head yes, and answering questions...”

T9 “Once the conversation seemed to die down and the student was shaking her head yes less often, and giving different visual cues...” Krystena “went back to the student...I asked her, again, the question. I said, “Now, hearing this, and talking about it, would you still say that you’re not a leader?”

T10 The student responds, “No. I think my mind has been changed. Yes, I do have leadership qualities, and there are areas of my life in which I am a leader.”

In the final turn (T10), we see how the prior turns of the conversation have led to a restructuring of the student’s contextual frames. While she entered into the discussion thinking leadership equates to title and thus saying, “I am not a leader,” she exited with a different view of leadership, which frames her view of herself. Krystena noted that feedback from other students was

the catalyst for having the student start to think about areas in which she may be a leader. In her mind, she was just a parent doing what needed to be done for her child. Her classmates’ feedback encouraged her to look at that a different way--instead of just being a parent looking out for her child, being a leader looking out for someone who needed some assistance.

Krystena played a secondary role in this contextual shift. She indicated that while this sequence of turns occurred among the students she “was in the front of the classroom kind of directing the conversation.” She further described, “I definitely stepped back during that and let the other students...Obviously, it would have been one thing for me to say that I consider you a leader, but to have her peers within the class--that I think was more beneficial for her.”

Another facilitator made these connections by setting up activities in a way that ensured participants are able to come to their own opinions and perspectives of material presented. While moderating participant discussion stemming from the video she showed in class, instead of responding to each individual comment offered, she looked for select opportunities in the dialogue to summarize, relate several participant ideas, and connect them to her lessons for the day.

Table 2

*Findings – Critical Reflection in the Context of Care*

Summary of Findings	Dialogue Behaviors Observed	Example(s)
Facilitators quietly challenged participant’s perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probing and questioning participants ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following up participant ideas with questions, such as “Why do you feel like that?”</li> </ul>
Participants more actively challenged each other’s perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenging and evaluating ideas, defending positions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questioning personal beliefs, choices.</li> <li>Providing justification for beliefs and actions.</li> </ul>
Facilitators made concentrated effort to connect participant’s ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extending dialogue between participants</li> <li>Relating and summarizing participant comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inviting participants into dialogue vs. responding herself</li> <li>Summarizing several comments vs. responding to individual contributions</li> </ul>

## Discussion

Women continue to experience unique challenges to their leadership. WLDPs have been suggested as important programmatic additions to help women reflect on and develop new perspectives on these challenges. To be effective with this task, WLDPs need to be more than safe environments where women share their experiences. To encourage the type of transformative learning that changes the ways women leaders view themselves as leaders both care and critical reflection are needed. Facilitators working with women leaders need to be able to hold the tension between care and critical reflection among groups of women who come with a variety of capacities for connected and separate knowing. I have provided, via this research, some insight into how this phenomenon occurs in practice.

First, I found some of the ways in which facilitators can establish caring contexts. The findings show that facilitators model care through their consideration of the participants' needs when establishing activities and setting class expectations. Care begins with establishing appropriate ground rules for engagement between and among participants. However, facilitators go beyond this baseline requirement. They demonstrate and model care in the ways in which they interact with participants. They often express their support of participants' contributions to the dialogue and make connections between the participants' points of view. This is especially true with those participants who due to their historically marginalized place may not be as confident in their voice.

Second, the facilitators in this study consistently worked to foster critical reflection through more subtle behaviors of probing, relating, and summarizing of ideas. While consistent with women's more connected ways of knowing, these dialogue behaviors also encourage critical reflection within a caring context. Helping others to appreciate our perspectives and recognizing the connections between our own and others ideas serves to remind us of the mutable constantly changing nature of the truth. The opportunity to intimately reflect on one's own and others' experience encourages the development of empathic capacity, which greatly changes one's perspectives on the world. Together, these processes help to develop new more open and inclusive frames of reference.

I further noted how facilitators were able to hold the tension between care and critical reflection through carefully monitoring the dialogue process. The facilitators were noted to continually monitor not just what was being said in a discussion, but what was being made by it. The facilitators disrupted those turns in the dialogue counter to the development of care, while encouraging those that supported critical reflection. Their attention was not only on what was being said, but included non-verbal cues and the ways in which the students participated in the class. These findings suggest a communication perspective on dialogue might be useful to facilitators of WLDPs who must establish caring yet

critically reflective dialogic spaces with women who have variety of ways of knowing.

Taking a communication perspective means recognizing dialogue as a highly relational, emergent process rather than an ideal to be achieved through specialized conditions and specific action. (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001; Pearce & Pearce, 2000, 2004; Stewart & Zediker, 2000). Viewing dialogue as emergent, relational, and contingent places a different emphasis on how it can be created in practice (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). Rather than following set logical and rational procedures, it requires an ability to monitor what is going on in the communication process (Gunnlaugson, 2007; Pearce & Pearce, 2004). In this spirit, dialogue is does not just happen, but neither can it be planned. The participants in dialogic moments have been likened to jazz musicians who interpret others' conversational moves and simultaneously shape their responses in ways in which the other person can relate (Gergen et al., 2001).

Central to the idea of taking a communication perspective is recognizing that meaning is co-created. Taking a communication perspective means establishing caring yet critical environments is not solely the responsibility of program facilitators. Participants have a place in creating conditions that foster transformative learning. This was evident in the findings of this study. The facilitators in this study embraced the diversity of experiences in the class to help move participants views of themselves and their place in the world. They gently probed women's ideas and found ways to relate and summarize to demonstrate difference while empathetically creating a new scaffolding upon which they might think and act.

The incidents of dialogue examined in this study involved engagement between women participants within a large age range and fairly mixed backgrounds. The question thus remains as to whether facilitators presented with more homogeneous groups of women would be able to create the same dialogic conditions. Would, for example, participants with a less diverse age range or experience level have enough variety of experiences to create the tensions that occurred in the dialogues between the women that varied in age from early 20s to 50s with a variety of different leadership experiences? Undertaking this study with women of more similar age, experience, and organizational contexts would be helpful in answering this additional question.

It should also be acknowledged that a few of the critical incidents suggested the participants involved may have experienced a change in their leadership identities. However, based on the limited information available this cannot be viewed as evidence that the dialogues observed resulted in substantial leadership development. Further studies combining evaluation of the dialogue conditions with some more formal evaluation or screening for leadership development among the participants involved would be needed to make this claim. It would also be inappropriate

based on the data to suggest the existence of these dialogue conditions leads to transformative leadership development in all cases. Dialogue conditions are only one of the elements suggested by literature as necessary for transformative learning to occur.

### Conclusion

WLDPs are suggested as transformative learning spaces where women have the opportunity to examine and rethink existing perspectives (Debebe et al., 2016). More specifically, WLDPs are proposed as safe spaces that follow gender sensitive teaching and learning practices which facilitate leadership growth and development (Debebe, 2011). However, transformative learning spaces need to be more than caring environments where women are able to come together and share their lived experience. Transformative learning requires dialogue between caring interlocutors that challenge existing ways of thinking and build new meaning. Program developers and facilitators are responsible for holding the delicate balance between care, connection, and critical reflection to ensure this can occur. The goal of this paper was to provide guidance on the ways facilitators might create these conditions through analysis of critical incidents of communication occurring in a women's leadership development program.

The findings suggest researchers and practitioners interested in developing transformative learning spaces for women's leadership development need a generative view of communication to guide their work. I have determined in this research as to how facilitators working with adult women in an academic based leadership program create caring environments by consistently demonstrating concern for participant's needs and feelings in both verbal and non-verbal ways, setting up specific ground rules, and actively monitoring conversation. It also shows how critical reflection occurred in this context of care. The active attention to establishing caring environments allowed students to challenge each other's perspectives safely. Moreover, facilitators questioned participant's ideas with subtle inquiries into their feelings and beliefs about issues. They also made conscious efforts to extend and relate participants' ideas to encourage deeper understanding. However, academic programs are not the only context in which women's leadership development programs occur. Additional research in organizational contexts and across different populations using a communication perspective of dialogue is recommended.

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